

In the Claims

Claim 1.(Previously Presented): A method of producing a nodulation inoculant containing reduced amounts of cell density factor (CDF) comprising the addition of iron to growth medium for a nodulation inoculant in amounts sufficient to reduce the concentration of CDF.

Claim 2.(Canceled).

Claim 3.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said iron is  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$ .

Claim 4.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said nodulation inoculant comprises *Bradyrhizobium* species.

Claim 5.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said nodulation inoculant comprises *Bradyrhizobium japonicum*.

Claim 6.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein medium is liquid.

Claim 7.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said iron is added prior to the addition of the nodulation inoculant.

Claim 8.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said iron is added simultaneously with the nodulation inoculant.

Claim 9.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said iron is added after the nodulation inoculant.

Claim 10.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said iron is added to the nodulation inoculant and the iron containing inoculant is added to the medium.

Claim 11. (Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein said iron is separately added to the nodulation inoculant and the medium.

Claim 12.(Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the iron has a concentration of at least about 0.5  $\mu$ M or at least about 0.1M.

Claim 13. (Original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the iron has a concentration that ranges from 0.5  $\mu$ M to 1M.

Claims 14-20.(Canceled).

Claim 21. (Previously Presented): A composition comprising a carrier and a nodulation inoculant produced according to the process of claim 1, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, or 32.

Claim 22.(Previously Presented): A method of producing a nodulation inoculant containing reduced amounts of cell density factor (CDF) comprising:

- a) providing a liquid growth medium suitable for the growth of nodulating bacteria;
- b) adding iron to the liquid medium in amounts sufficient to reduce cell density factor (CDF) expression by said bacteria;
- c) adding nodulating bacteria to said liquid medium; and
- d) culturing the liquid medium containing the added nodulating bacteria to provide a nodulation inoculant.

Claim 23.(Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein said nodulation inoculant has increased nodulation efficiency as compared to a nodulation inoculant that is not treated with iron.

Claim 24.(Previously Presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein said nodulation inoculant has increased nodulation efficiency as compared to a nodulation inoculant that is not treated with iron.

Claim 25.(Previously Presented): A method of increasing the nodulation efficiency of a nodulation inoculant comprising the addition of iron to *Bradyrhizobium japonicum* cultures in a liquid medium and growing said cultures, wherein said iron is added in amounts sufficient to reduce the CDF expression in said cultures.

Claim 26. (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 25, wherein said nodulation inoculant has increased nodulation efficiency as compared to a nodulation inoculant that is not treated with iron.

Claim 27. (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 22, wherein a single species or strain of nodulating bacteria is added to said liquid culture.

Claim 28. (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 27, wherein a single species of nodulating bacteria is added to said liquid culture.

Claim 29. (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 27, wherein a single strain of nodulating bacteria is added to said liquid culture.

Claim 30 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 28, wherein said single species is *Bradyrhizobia japonicum*.

Claim 31.(Previously Presented): The method according to claim 29, wherein said single strain is *Bradyrhizobia japonicum* USDA 110.

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Claim 32.(Previously Presented): The method according to claim 29, wherein said single strain is *Bradyrhizobia japonicum* USDA 123.

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